

Health Literacy among Hotel Owners and Tourist Guides in Sauraha, Chitwan, Nepal: A Mixed-Methods Study

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ABSTRACT

Health literacy is important in tourism sectors, so it is necessary to have knowledge of health literacy among stakeholders. The study analyzes the health literacy among hotel owners and tourist guides who are the main stakeholders of the tourism sectors of Sauraha Chitwan. Objectives of this study are to assess the level of health literacy among hotel owners and tourist guides, to examine training exposure related to health and safety, and to analyze the relationship between socio-economic status and health literacy awareness. The study followed the mixed-methods research design and used both primary and secondary sources of data. A field survey was used to collect the primary data from the field, and secondary data were gathered from documents related to tourism and health literacy. 100 respondents, including 50 hotel owners and 50 tourist guides, were randomly selected for an interview. Quantitative data were analyzed by using statistical tools, and qualitative information was managed in thematic analysis. It is found that there is a positive relationship between socioeconomic status and awareness about health literacy. There is moderate relationship between socio economic status and health literacy. There is moderate variance in respondents' knowledge and practice of health promotion in study area and positive correlation between training and health literacy and preventive practices in the tourism sector. Like that there is average, 48% of the respondents have awareness or practice of health promotion and disease prevention.

Keywords: *Tourism stakeholders; Hotel owners; Tourist guides; Health and safety; Nepal*



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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the growing service businesses of the world, and it plays an important role in enhancing national GDP, cultural preservation, and maintaining foreign exchange. To enhance the tourism business in any tourist spots, knowing health literacy is essential because it ensures safety, plays a role in improving the quality of service, helps to prevent disease, and provides emergency rescue and first aid. It helps to develop sustainable and responsible tourism. Having knowledge of health literacy among stakeholders is beneficial for both community people and the individual who is involved in the tourism business, such as hotel owners, tourist guides, local shopkeepers, cooks, waiters, and other staff. In this study, the perception, knowledge, and attitudes of health literacy among hotel owners and tourist guides are examined.

The health and well-being of tourists and their safety are important issues in tourism development in Nepal. The World Health Organization (2025) noted that health literacy is important in public health because it plays a role in developing the cognitive skills of the individual on personal health. The issue of health literacy among tourist guides and hotel owners is one of the issues of community health that focuses on risk perception, developing preventive behaviour of health and well-being in terms of destination health safety. González et al. (2024) brought the new concept of health literacy, especially among tourism stakeholders, in terms of carbon literacy, digital literacy and disaster prevention literacy. This study discusses workplace health literacy that plays a role in preventing disasters and diseases. During the time of the pandemic of COVID -19, most of the tourist destinations had closed due to the fear of the transmission of the disease. Saito et al. (2025) discuss tourism health in terms of mental relief of tourists and work-related burden and its way out of relief. They discussed the health literacy of tourism sectors to minimize the health risk in tourist spots. Similarly, Mazlan et al. (2023) focused on the health-related workplace environment and the satisfaction of the workers in their workplace in terms of reducing health risk and health safety. Like that, Joshi et al. (2024) talked about the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of the respondents and their relationship with health literacy in relation to local entrepreneurs. This study talked about the importance of health literacy in the workplace and among working staff because working staff should have knowledge about health risks and ways to prevent them. In tourism sectors, there are various issues related to health literacy, like reducing risk factors, awareness about health safety, cleanness of the environment, including refreshment of tourists and tourist guides, and hotel owners themselves. This study analyses the perception, attitudes, and practices of health literacy by the tourist guides and hotel owners who are directly involved in the tourism business in the study area.

Hotel owners are engaged in hospitality-related activities, and tourist guides are involved in trekking, jungle safety, and boating, which is one of the riskiest sectors of the tourism business. There is a need for health literacy related to health safety and health risk.

During the time of COVID-19, the tourism sectors of Nepal were highly influenced by the related problems, and the issue of health literacy among stakeholders of the tourism sectors is being discussed. To address the lack of research on health literacy among stakeholders of tourism sectors, the study focuses on access to health literacy among hotel owners and tourist guides currently working in Sauraha Chitwan, the most important tourist site of Nepal.

Knowing health literacy is important to maintain a healthy environment in a hotel and ensure safety. In the study area, annually, two lakh tourists visit with different purposes (Ghimire, 2024). The number of tourists who visit Sauraha is involved in different activities such as bathing in the Rapti River, jungle safari, yoga, jeep safari, and living in a peaceful area. The roles of tourist guides and hotel owners are significant in maintaining the health of tourists while they visit this area. Due to environmental pollution, the risk of communicable diseases and other biological and chemical hazards has increased in the area. Knowledge about health literacy helps to reduce such risks and supports the development of sustainable tourism in the area.

Theoretical Reviews

The study is based on Nutbeam's theory of health literacy. The theory talks about knowing health-related issues, understanding these health issues, and its' proper utilization. Nutbeam (2000) highlights the importance of acquiring information about health services and said, "An individual's ability to obtain, comprehend, and effectively use health-related information to enhance and sustain their overall health and well-being."(p.35). In his theory, health literacy is evaluated as a form of well-being of individuals and communities on the basis of his/ her knowledge, interpretation, understanding and evaluation. Nutbeam (2008) noted that health literacy involves the acquisition of knowledge, personal skills, and confidence necessary to engage in activities that improve both individual and community health by changing personal habits and living conditions. Like Nutbeam Sorensen (2012) also defined health literacy as including the knowledge, motivation, and skills necessary for obtaining and utilizing health information. He notes, "This capability empowers individuals to make informed decisions regarding their healthcare options, strategies for disease prevention, and methods for promoting their health. As a result, they can enhance their overall quality of life progressively over time" (7). In 1998, the World Health

Organization (WHO) described health literacy in terms of people's understanding of health information, access to services and health decisions. Health Organization (WHO)(2009) highlights, "Health literacy includes the concept of social ability that affects a person's motivation and ability to acquire, understand, and apply information in ways that promote and maintain optimal health"(58).Health literacy covers the broad issue of health-related phenomena that are connected to both basic information about health services and individual and societal motivation factors.(Pedro et al.,2016, p.261).From these definitions and theoretical concepts, we can understand health literacy in terms of information access, interpretation, and utilization of health-related issues like controlling risks, using safety measures, changing behaviour and maintaining fitness for health. Ultimately, health literacy is vital for improving and maintaining optimal health outcomes.

For the enhancement of tourism sectors in Nepal, there should be a minimum requirement of health facilities for tourists. Hotel owners and tourist guides are the main components whose role is very high to maintain health and safety in tourism industries so that in this study health it analyzes the issue literacy is analyzed from the perspective of hotel owners and tourist guides. Theoretical reviews related to health literacy also included and pointed out the growing interest in health and wellness in tourism. It is essential to investigate how hotel owners and tourist guides perceive the idea of health literacy. It is related to the cognitive and social abilities of the respondents.

Literature Review

Researchers and writers like Dündar Ege & Demir Uslu (2018) discuss health literacy in terms of the process and practice of health care and explain, "Rising healthcare costs in developed countries, extended wait times for treatment, and the increasing availability of affordable, high-quality healthcare services in developing nations are vital factors impacting this sector (Dündar Ege & Demir, 2018)." In contemporary times, health tourism is one of the main dimensions of tourism in the world because people travel from one place to another for treatment and well-being. Theobald (1998) defines "An individual journeying overseas for a minimum duration of twenty-four hours" (Theobald (1998)). Entertainment and making fun are the main motto of tourism in modern times, so the issue of health is important in tourism. Kamenidou et al (2014) note, "Tourism is defined by various motivations that inspire people to take short trips to locations with specific attractive qualities, where they engage in voluntary activities. (p.67). Tourism is not a new thing, except enjoying in leisure periods, which has a deep relationship with a healthy environment and a healthy lifestyle. In the same line, Karadağ & Güven (2024) talked about health and tourism in terms of the satisfaction of tourists while they visit tourist spots, health behaviour of tourists, and the situation of restoring health by enjoying in tourist spots.

Likewise, Coelho, Costa & Nunes (2023) highlighted the understanding of health and well-being perceived by tourists while they are visiting the tourist spot. The study focuses on the situation of health literacy among tourists. Like that, Ahmad & Sheikh (2024) discussed the health literacy in terms of risk impacts, behaviour intention of medical tourism in the context of Pakistan. In the context of medical tourism, health literacy plays a significant role in developing health risks and health safety of the place where people go for treatment. Likewise, Çakmak & Gürkan (2025) focus on the relationship between health literacy and awareness of health tourism. The study recommended that an educational intervention is necessary to enhance the health literacy among the stakeholders. In the same way, Pırnar & Altın (2024) noted that components of health literacy are important for health tourism. It plays a role in enhancing the service quality and fulfilling the demand of tourism through maintaining a healthy environment in tourist spots. Kamenidou et al. (2014) focused on tourism related to the health and wellness sector and noted, "Tourism is the substantial global growth, becoming a dynamic part of the tourism market in a country's economy"(p.67).Tourism includes activities focused on relaxation by visiting places that provide plenty of entertainment for visitors. Like that, Alén et al. (2016) talked about leisure tourism and its impacts on lifestyle change, which is related to economic conditions, an aging population, and a growing focus on healthier habits, which encompasses a heightened interest in sports, nutrition, and a connection to nature. In the same way, Smith et al. (2017) suggest that health and wellness tourism mainly focus on the healing of the physical body, which could ultimately enhance overall happiness. In 2021, amidst the difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal attracted 150,962 visitors, who spent an average of 15.5 days in the country, indicating an increasing interest in immersive wellness experiences (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2021). The statistics indicate that the tourism sector in Nepal is on a path of growth.

In modern society, tourism has transformed into a way to refresh and enhance people's mental health. Luo et al. (2018) highlighted that the incorporation of mental health promotion and spiritual well-being into this framework is a relatively new advancement, as these "ideas are gaining importance in assessing a person's overall health" (Luo et al. 2018). This form of tourism can fulfill the emotional and psychological needs of travelers, alleviating the physical and mental stressors through spiritual exploration and a tranquil retreat from daily life. Smith et al. (2017) assert that a successful wellness tourism experience should focus on the overall well-being of the individual. Presently, attaining relaxation and peace of mind is considered a vital factor in enhancing customer satisfaction in the health and wellness tourism sector. In the enhancement of the tourism sector, there needs to be improvement in the situation of health and sanitation, as Loureiro et al. (2013) highlight, " A rewarding experience is essential for

individuals utilizing health and wellness tourism services, as it motivates them to endorse the service to others, thereby inspiring similar endeavors"(p.45). Like that Bhusal et al. (2021) highlighted access of health literacy among under graduate students studying in public health. The study discussed the issue of health related decision making.

Health and well-being are necessary for tourism development, so professionals involved in the tourism sector have basic knowledge of health literacy. Hjalager et al. (2001) explained that the professional who is involved in tourism sectors should be conscious about the well-being of the tourist while they visit the place for entertainment.

The relationships among individuals are deemed essential in the context of wellness tourism. The demand for health services, in conjunction with welfare practices, is shaped by the arrival of tourists in certain regions. In health tourism, the main emphasis is on obtaining medical care rather than engaging in leisure activities, sightseeing, or socializing. This traditional motivation for healing has expanded to encompass preventive strategies and psychological aspects of well-being, rooted in the understanding that humans are holistic beings made up of body, mind, and spirit, both in modern times and throughout history.

Tourism is vital for Nepal's foreign exchange revenue, with visitors spending an average of USD 48 daily in 2024. By integrating wellness services, there is an opportunity to attract wealthy tourists, which could enhance revenue potential (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2024). Nepal's expanding hospitality sector, featuring 1,345 hotels and a combined bed capacity of 48,412, aligns with international wellness trends and boosts the country's appeal as a health-focused destination (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2023). The data showed that Nepal has not sufficiently developed its tourism sector, despite its high potential for enhancing tourism.

Negligence of health and well-being is one of the major causes for not developing tourism sectors like other nations, so Nepal should think about the health and well-being of tourists while they visit Nepal. Health tourism in Nepal, encompassing both medical and wellness travel, has become a vital part of the global tourism industry. This sector attracts patients and those in search of wellness to destinations that offer health facilities like meditation and spiritual healing practices. If Nepal enhances the health and safety measures for tourists, the influx of visitors to the country will rise. In the context of the study area, it appears that stakeholders primarily focus on short-term profits, often neglecting the health, safety, and well-being of tourists. This oversight could adversely impact the long-term development of tourism in the region, highlighting the need to prioritize the health and well-being of visitors. The reviews show that health tourism is one of the recent subjects of research that focuses on the overall aspect of healthy life of the tourists and helps to maintain the healthy

environment of the tourism spots. In my study area, there is also an urgent need to maintain a healthy environment for tourists who are visiting for entertainment and refreshment.

METHODOLOGY

The study followed the mixed-methods research design. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. Secondary data were collected from books, articles, journals, and government reports. These data were collected by using a library study. Primary data were gathered from a field survey. Survey design was used to obtain the data, and a sample population from the universe. A simple random sampling method was used to collect the data, and 50 tourist guides and 50 hotel owners participated in this study. Questions related to health literacy, including issues of health promotion, health care, and disease prevention, were asked of the respondents. Face-to-face interview techniques were used to collect data from the field. The field visit was conducted from September 10 to 20, 2025. Quantitative data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.

Study Area

Sauraha is the study area of this study. The study area is selected due to two reasons. The first reason is that the area is one of the most important tourist destination of Nepal and such types of study has not conducted in this area. The study area is located in Ratnagar municipality of Chitwan district, Bagmati province. It is 156 km far from the Kathmandu, capital city of Nepal. The Sauraha is main gate way of Chitwan national park (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Map of Study Area: Location of *Sauraha* in the map of Nepal. Source: Sauraha <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sauraha>

Table 1: Socio economic status of the respondents.

Questions related to socio-economic background of the respondents	Results	Mean (average)
Educational Qualifications	10 percent of respondents only passed the secondary level, 60 percent passed the bachelor level, and 20 percent passed above the bachelor level	2.11
Family Occupation	Fifty percent of respondents come from farming families, thirty percent are from business families, and twenty percent have family occupations in service and wage labor.	1.70
Professional Area	In the study area, respondents were involved in different activities, whereas they were known as hotel owners and tourist guides. 40 percent are nature guides, 30% involved in managing the hotel 30 percent, only look after the workers and take economic responsibility of the hotel	1.90
Residence District in Chitwan	Inside Chitwan, 76 percent of the respondents of this study are the permanent inhabitants of Chitwan, and 24 percent are recent migrants or only come to the study area for a job and business. Average Socio Economic Status Score SES=(2.11+1.70+1.90+1.76)/4=1.87 SES=(2.11+1.70+1.90+1.76)/4=1.87*	1.76
		SDSES=0.17

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2: Questions related to health literacy.

Questions Related to Health Literacy	Response percent
Idea about health literacy	20 percent respondents give positive answer and 80 percent give negative answer
Do you take any Training on that	No 80 percent, Yes 20 percent
Does it Necessary	Yes 70 percent, No 10 percent, I don't know 20 percent
Does your company or hotel think about tourist health and well being	Yes -80 percent, No 20 percent
Do you think to maintain good health service for guests? If yes how?	Yes, 90 percent, (Managing equipment 40 percent, improve service 50 percent), No (10 percent)
Does insurance practice	It is conditional 70 percent, all- 30 percent
Considers the costs related to accessible health and welfare services.	Nothing accessible – 50 percent, Accessible just for somebody – 30 percent, Accessible – 10 percent and Welfare – 10 percent (Average Health Literacy Score HL=(20+20+70+80+90+30)/6=51.67 HL = (20 + 20 + 70 + 80 + 90 + 30) / 6 = 51.67 HL=(20+20+70+80+90+30)/6=51.67 (scale (0-1): HL=51.67/100=0.52 HL = 51.67 / 100 = 0.52 HL=51.67/100=0.52 (Mean = 51.67)SDHL=28.36

Source: Field Survey, 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the basis of the guidelines of the European health literacy survey model, questions have been prepared under three themes of health literacy and analyzed. Questions were asked of 100 respondents. They were from different socio-economic backgrounds and were involved in the tourism sector as hotel owners and tourist guides. The following table shows the socio-demographic characterization of respondents (Table 1). Table 1 shows the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents who were from various age group, educational background, gender and professional status. All these respondents are actively participates in tourism industries of Sauraha as tourist guides and hotel owners. According to data majority of the hotel owners and tourist guides are from Chitwan district.

Knowledge and Practice of Health Literacy

There asked some questions related to the perception of respondents on health literacy (Table 2). In the process of asking questions. The study also observed the situation of

the hotel and varied the answers they gave about the practice of health hygiene and environmental hygiene. The following table shows the knowledge and practice of the respondents on health literacy. The majority of the respondents have no idea about health literacy; however, they made a commitment to maintain the minimum health requirements and health security of the tourists visiting Sauraha. Only a few of them have taken training about health literacy related to personal hygiene, food hygiene, applying ad first aid, etc. The majority of the respondents do not receive any training on health literacy. Insurance is compulsory for hotel and tourist guides; however, a few of the respondents have no idea about insurance. Table 3 shows the moderate positive relationship between socioeconomic status and health literacy. Respondents having higher education, better occupation, and permanent residence have higher health literacy and. Tourism professionals (hotel owners and guides) with stronger SES show better awareness and practice of health literacy.

Perception of the respondents about the knowledge of health literacy and their hotels and company did not prioritize the issue of health literacy in their business, however, in jungle safari, elephant riding the boating there

Table 3: Correlation between socio economic Status and Health Literacy.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Socio-Economic Status (SES)	1.87	0.17
Health Literacy (HL)	0.52	0.28
	$r=+0.61$	

Field survey, 2025

Table 4: Perception of respondents related health promotion and prevention from disease.

Survey Questions	Response percentage
Are there any health concerns in your hotel or company	Yes 50 percent, no-50 percent
Does the local government tourism board raise the issue of health	No -60 percent, yes -40percent
Do tourists ask about health services and safety?	Yes-80 percent, No.-20 percent
Does your company or hotel give training about health literacy, such as communicable diseases, tourist safety	No-60 percent, yes -40 percent
Do you have any idea of health safety and prevention from communicable diseases like the common cold, rabies, etc	Yes -60 percent, No- 40 percent
Do you have any idea that hotels and companies think about health issues like curing on the spot, sending to the hospital etc	Yes -70, no-30 percent (tourist own self take risk)
Does the government policy encourage promoting health in the study area	Yes- 20 percent No – 80 percent
Any disease prevention program run in the study area	Yes -20 percent, No-80 percent
	yes-1, no=0
	Mean Health Promotion Score
	$0.50+0.40+0.80+0.40+0.60+0.70+0.20+0.20$
	8
	Average mean 0.48

Table 5: Relation between health promotion and prevention.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation (r)
Health Promotion & Prevention	0.48	0.21	+0.69

is risk animal attract, attack of elephant, possible of sink in the river, possible of transmit animals' disease and communicable disease (Table 4). Data shows that respondents feel need of training of health literacy but the situation of getting training is not sufficient in study area. In study area government and non-government sectors neglect to prevent disease as well as health promotion because only few respondents reported that disease prevention program hardly lunch in study area. Table 5 shows the mean values (0.48) of which means moderate awareness and practice of health promotion and disease prevention. The standard deviation is 0.21 which refers to large differences among respondents **about** perception of respondents related health promotion and prevention from disease. + 0.69 suggested the positive correlation between institutional support and its relation between preventive practice and health literacy.

Conclusion

Health literacy is important in the tourism sector. During the time of COVID-19, tourism sectors faced a crisis due to a lack of information, knowledge and practice of health behaviour. Respondents have moderate types of knowledge on health literacy, so it is necessary to improve the perception and practice of health behaviours of the hotel owners and tourist guides. Sahuraha is one of the important tourist spots of Nepal; however, there is a variance among respondents having knowledge about

health literacy. Educated respondents have a high degree of knowledge on health literacy, but respondents with low education status have less knowledge on it. The study suggests that there is a positive relationship between the socioeconomic status of the respondents and knowledge about health literacy. It highlights the complexity of health literacy and its impact on individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background. The respondents have health literacy, making it crucial to introduce interventions designed to enhance their knowledge about health and safety. It is necessary to make a policy related to improving the health literacy level among the stakeholders of the tourism sector. The government makes programs to enhance the level of health literacy among hotel owners and tourist guides. Local government should regularly provide training related to health literacy and monitor the level of health literacy practice by the hotel owners and tourist guides working in the study area. The study is recommended to pursue further research that employs more effective sampling methods, utilizes a broader health literacy survey questionnaire, and incorporates qualitative techniques. This approach will help to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the various factors that influence health literacy.

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Annex:



Photo: 1 Bed Room of Hotel



Photo: 3 Photo with Hotel owner in Sauraha



Photo: 2 Photo of Hotel